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ABSTRACT

Four different assumptions about the nature of rural education govern major strategies to reform its deficiencies: rural education is a problem because it is not urban; some small isolated schools are "necessarily existent"; small schools are desirable because of flexibility and responsiveness; and educational problems are independent of school size. An effectiveness study of 14 currently used U.S. rural education reform strategies reveals that successful strategies are highly congruent with community cultural setting and perceived needs, support and are supported by an important community sector, and are long lasting, low-budget programs. The "one-best-system" approach often seen in consolidation efforts is unsuccessful because rural schools are unique in their values, staff, and perception of total education. Rural education would be improved with better leadership and better teachers, access to services available to urban systems, more direct community involvement, heavily federally funded model systems, and more adoption of proven educational practices. State and federal eudcation policy should consider rural community differences, rural education development capability should be nourished, and alternative solutions to rural education problems should be encouraged. (SB)

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IMPROVING RURAL EDUCATION: PAST EFFORTS, SOME IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

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IMPROVING RURAL EDUCATION: PAST EFFORTS, SOME IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

Rural education has traditionally been looked upon as the poor country cousin of the public school system. By accepted standards it has been backward, less well financed, poorly staffed, offered fewer educational opportunities and turned out students less well equipped to cope with an industrialized urban society. Efforts to resolve these deficiencies fall into four rather distinct themes of rural school reform, themes based on different assumptions about the nature of the problem. Theme one states that the problem with rural education is that it is not urban, the rural school is the problem. Convinced that within the techniques of industrialization, e.g., bigger is better, specialization of job task, proper supervision, lies the secret for efficiency and effectiveness in education, reform efforts with few exceptions have molded rural education into a likeness of urban education. Even before the turn of the century and paralleling the industrial development of the country, efforts were made to systematize rural schools. The best professional thinking was that even the smallest one-roomed school could be given a graded structure with the stuff of learning broken down into discreet subject matter courses, thus giving some order to the haphazard educational process resulting from excessive community control, having all age levels in one room and highly transient school marms or masters whose success was measured by whether or not they could manage the students.

In the 1890's the National Education Association Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools took additional steps to define the remedies for the rural school problem, many of which are still being applied today---"consolidation of schools and transportation of pupils, expert supervision by county superintendents, taking the schools out of politics, professionally-trained teachers,---the rural school would teach country children sound values and vocational skills; the result was to be a standardized, modernized 'community' in which leadership came from the professionals."

Equality of opportunity for rural youth in the eyes of early reformers meant uniform regulations, which it still does today. David Tyack, in The One Best System, describes the extremes to which such regulations were spelled out down to the size and kind of pictures to be hung on the wall of the school. The bottom line of implementing these reform efforts according to Tyack was the deliberate shifting of power from laymen to professionals. The completeness of this shift of power is reflected in the successful implementation of school consolidation policies through the years. One can find few examples where communities have willingly given up their schools, the pressures for consolidation almost always coming from the outside by professionals. Armed with their rational arguments for efficiency and effectiveness the number of school districts has been reduced to around 16,000 during the last 75 years. And while few would argue that we still need the 200,000 one-roomed schools which existed in 1910, it is clear that the one-best-system mind set exemplified by consolidation still pervades public policy.

Theme Two of rural school reform did not emerge until the midfifties. Basically agreeing with the one-best-system philosophy of Theme One, Theme Two recognized that even with consolidation some schools would have to remain small because of terrain and sparsity of population. The concept of the "necessarily existent" small school came into being and was given some degree of legitimacy by a series of grants from the Fund for the Advancement of Education/ Ford Foundation. The Rocky Mountain Area Project for Small High Schools in Colorado, which implemented such strategies as multiple class teaching, small group techniques, the use of film courses in physics and chemistry, gifted student seminars, was a companion piece to a vigorous, statewide school consolidation plan. The Rural School Improvement Program of Berea College, Kentucky, retrained teachers to work in the back hills of Kentucky, where consolidation was not yet an option; the Alaska Rural School Project provided a bootcamp survival indoctrination course for future "bush" teachers, most of whom had just newly arrived from the lower 48. Other programs spawned by the "necessarily existent" rural school concept included the Oregon Small Schools Project, the Texas Small Schools Project, the Upper Midwest Small School Program, the Rural Education Improvement Program of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

This era of small school improvement efforts was capped by the Western States Small Schools Project, a five-state program funded by The Ford Foundation, which carried on some of the strategies of RMAP and explored many others including the installation of new curricula, computer based modular scheduling, telephone teaching, nongraded organization, bilingual and career exploration education.

The concept of the necessarily existent small school found its way into law in at least one state, Utah, where such schools once designated qualify for additional state funding. While it is clear that many of the strategies implemented by these projects did in fact make sense for small schools, only in isolated instances have the practices continued. Gifted student seminars continue to be held on the Oneonta State University campus in the Catskills, more individualized approaches using differentiated materials and audio tapes can be found in some classrooms. However, for the most part personnel changes, the disappearance of project support systems and the continual pressures of one-best-system standards have erased almost all vestiges of these practices.

Theme Three actually emerged about the same time as Theme Two, the principle spokesman being Dr. Frank Cyr of Columbia Teachers College and the Catskill Area Project for Small School Design. Cyr argued that not only were small schools necessary, they were even desirable. Using an automobile/train analogy to contrast the potential flexibility and responsiveness of small schools vs. the rigidity and efficiency of large systems, Cyr proposed that if properly organized one could take advantage of the inherent strengths of smallness offering a quality of education which even urban schools might emulate. While his proposals were not taken seriously by policy makers of the 50's, the "small is beautiful" philosophy now appears to be gaining credibility, with Sher and others arguing that the hoped for economics of larger scale educational systems

have not been sufficient to offset the advantages of small community schools.[1]

The Fourth Theme of rural school reform emerged in the midsixties with the advent of the Great Society programs. The assumptions of Theme Four state that the problems of education are generic, the problems of schooling are basically the same regardless of size, e.g., schools are not meeting the needs of the poor, the minorities, the handicapped---the solutions, Title I, PL 94-142, are applicable everywhere.

While the four themes emerged sequentially over time, the later themes have not replaced the earlier. Indeed the consolidation thinking of Theme One along with the assumptions of Theme Four continue to dominate current policy with regard to rural education. Because of this domination of the one-best-system mind set, Theme Two is tolerated only where no other options exist, Theme Three, the strengths of smallness, has yet to have an opportunity to test its viability.

"Improving Education in Rural America: Past Efforts, Future Opportunities", (a study which will be completed in the fall of 1979), has selected as wide a range of strategies as could be found among these various sets of assumptions concerning rural education reform. (Since neither the people nor operational strategies of the 1950's could be found, programs included date only as far back as the late 1960's.) The strategies under study range from intra institutional programs, such as improving teacher preparation and new instructional

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[1] Economy, Efficiency and Equality: The Myths of Rural School and District Consolidation, Sher and Tompkins, July 1976, NIE, U. S. Dept. of H.E.W., Washington, D.C. 20208

programs to community based political efforts. Programs were selected which ranged from centrally designed/heavily funded programs to locally initiated/small scale efforts. (See attached list of programs included.) Sites were selected for study because (1) they were considered to be a good, if not the best implementation of a particular strategy, and (2) the site was representative of one of the many populations which make up rural America.

Since the ultimate usefulness of an intervention is determined at the local community level, we attempted to learn as much about the local community setting as possible, analysing the interaction between the local community characteristics and the intervention. The end result of our efforts will be a document which attempts to describe how a dozen ± different strategies to improve rural education were played out in a particular setting. Here briefly are some thumbnail sketches of our findings, obviously over simplified and therefore not balanced presentations.

"Rural education would be improved if it had access to the same kind of services available in urban systems."---

A network of twenty Education Services Centers has been established in Texas with five years and $5 million of Title III funds to serve both urban and rural schools of the state. Region XV, the selected site for our study, operates out of San Angelo, serves 48 school systems, most of which are rural, scattered over 25,000 square miles, enrolling 41,000 students (less than 2 students/sq. mile). Originally established as media centers (1969), a function Region XV still serves extremely well with delivery of materials to

member schools twice a week, the ESCs now serve primarily as a conduit for federal and state mandated programs. With two thirds of the $80 million statewide budget coming from state and federal funds, the "innovative" functions envisioned by Title III and indeed much of the responsiveness to local district needs as written into law have given way to implementing programs for migrants, the handicapped, drug education, driver education, uniform data processing. The ESC is one Title III innovation which has been institutionalized. The twenty agencies represent another level of bureaucratic structure with their own boards, not directly responsible either to the SEA or LEAs. While not a vehicle for reform, educational services are now available to rural Texas schools which were once found only in urban systems.

"Rural education would be improved if teachers were better trained."---

Three strategies of the study related directly to the problem of inadequately trained teachers: The University of North Dakota's New School for Behavioral Studies in Education, the Holmes County Teacher Corps Project, and the Mountain Towns Teacher Center. Although none of the strategies are inherently rural, all have served rural populations. In North Dakota, of the 59.2% of the state's 4,537 elementary teachers that did not hold college degrees in 1967, most were rural. Likewise, a large percentage of poor/minority children the focus of Teacher Corps, live in rural areas. Mountain Towns was established to serve the schools of two supervisory unions in the ski country of Southern Vermont.

The North Dakota program is of interest because (1) the statewide study which called for all teachers to be fully qualified by 1975 recognized that the university's School of Education was ill prepared for the task of upgrading teachers and established a parallel structure, the New School for Behavioral Studies in Education (now merged with the School of Education into the Center for Teaching and Learning); (2) it proposed to implement an open education approach to learning, a philosophy the New School attempted to model in its teacher education program; (3) it established a unique recycling process of preparing graduate level interns which then took over classrooms while the less than degreed teachers finished up on campus; and (4) it established an off campus support network which is highly unusual for a university. And while elementary rural education has not been reformed as Silberman's Crisis in the Classroom would have us believe, the long term commitment of the university staff to its trainees, the relatively small amounts of outside money have contributed to a climate of continual growth not found in other reform efforts.

In contrast, Teacher Corps in Holmes County which also linked a university with a targeted group of elementary teachers for inservice training was there for only two years provided a very traditional master's degree program which has resulted in little real change in classroom procedures. In the evolution from a preservice program bringing Peace Corps type teachers into the classrooms of poor minorities to an inservice program for existing teachers,

Teacher Corps has apparently lost much of its leverage for change. As a federal intervention it cannot do as the State of North Dakota did, create a parallel structure to bypass what was perceived to be an inadequate teacher training program. In Holmes County it was mostly more of the same, which was inadequate in the first place.

Whereas the genesis of the North Dakota New School Program was with the state and Teacher Corps with the federal government, Mountain Towns Teachers Center emerged from the concerns of local teachers, most of whom were not native to Vermont. Mountain Towns was to be a place where teachers could come together to share problems and ideas related to classroom practice. Like the New School the Center promoted child centered, open education, a philosophy encouraged by the "Vermont Design for Education", a state education agency plan for improving education. The schools of the area were open space construction, teachers needed help in implementing programs in this environment.

When it was clear that because of distance, terrain and established behavior patterns, teachers were not just dropping in for help, a more formal structure of classes and workshops was established, along with regularly scheduled visits by staff to participating schools. Established in 1973 prior to federal teacher center legislation, Mountain Towns is a small two person operation housed in an excess space in Deerfield Valley Elementary (Wilmington, Vermont) financed by a Title III grant. These funds have now run out and typical of independent centers everywhere the nature of the operation, i.e., it serves primarily those teachers who subscribe to an open education

philosophy/the organizational structure, operated and controlled by teachers, negates tapping into the ongoing financial resources of the local school budgets, leaves the future of the Center in doubt.

"Rural education would be improved if the community was more directly involved in the education decision making process."---

Two heavily funded programs by the federal government were community involvement strategies, Urban/Rural of EPDA and the Rural Futures Development Program of the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. Urban/Rural inspired by the Ocean Hill Brownsville struggle for community control reasoned that by shifting decision-making power from central administration to local communities, education would become more responsive to local needs. And since the money for Urban/Rural came out of the Education Professions Development Act, the decisions in question needed to be about teacher training. "Community control" which was negotiated to "parity-in-decision-making" between school and community was to be fostered by giving community councils control of Urban/Rural funds. Typical of one-best-system thinking if this shift of control would improve education for urban poor, it would also be appropriate for rural poor. In Fort Gay, however, the good guys and bad guys did not break down along administration vs. community lines. Rather, as is characteristic of West Virginia's politics, you are a white hat or a black hat depending on political faction or kinfolk relationships. Giving $750,000 to a 23-member council did little to shift power but rather provided another arena for factional differences to get played out which they did for five years in weekly meetings of from three to five hours duration.

In spite of good intentions by Urban/Rural to let local communities call the shots, inflexible time lines and bureaucratic expectations of what constituted an acceptable proposal forced reliance on a neighboring university for local program design. With the loss of local ownership, council members who originally worked without pay, joined the majority of other U/R councils in paying themselves $10 a meeting.

According to the elementary principal, the inservice education programs were "too much of a teacher-oriented college degree program---without much effect on their actual classroom behavior." Other than a much higher percent of master's degree teachers, the remaining impact most visible in Fort Gay in a U/R financed, school operated FM radio station. A planned end-of-program potluck dinner celebration did not materialize, word got out that there were no funds remaining to pay for attendance.

The Rural Futures Development Program of the Northwest Lab took a different tack toward community involvement. Rather than trying to shift power from the administration to the local school site by giving control of funds to school community councils RFD turned to a rational problem-solving process dependent on a neutral process facilitator (PF). With the help of PFs, School Community Groups (SCGs) were formed and given training in group processes, conducting needs assessments, agenda building, considering alternative solutions and making persuasive recommendations to the board. The San Juan School District (Utah), the site of the pilot implementation, was being threatened with a law suit by a Native American legal group charging discrimination on the part of the district against the Navajos which made up 50% of the school population. RFD was seen as an alternative

to legal action. SCGs were formed, needs assessments conducted and recommendations made to the board for the building of two new schools in the southern end of the county to serve the Navajo population. Largely through the work of the SCGs a bond issue was passed, one school is now completed and the other in progress. SCGs in other parts of the county have addressed issues of teacher evaluation and inservice education. With the demise of project money the number of PFs has been reduced and the neutrality central to that position is eroding, the remaining PF is now paid by the district and serves more and more the interests of the administration.

"Rural Education would be improved by creating model exemplary systems using large amounts of federal money to bring about comprehensive change."---

Experimental Schools was a reaction to the "piecemeal" change strategies of the sixties which were perceived to be ineffective. Many of the pieces of better education were at hand, new curricula, new staffing patterns, active community involvement, new uses of time, space and facilities, but nowhere had they been assembled in a holistic reform effort. In the best traditions of applied research, ES, with full federal funding for five years, would make this happen. A competitive program, the first round of selection in 1971 resulted in no rural sites; small schools could not compete successfully under the guidelines which reflected an urban bias. A separate competition in 1972 resulted in the funding of ten rural sites, one of which was the South Umpqua School District in Western Oregon. Considered by ABT Associates, who had a contract to evaluate the

rural ES, as one of the best rural sites, most able to carry out the federal agenda, South Umpqua did institute many changes although short of comprehensive change. New programs were instituted, some of which were controversial, teachers were asked to implement decisions which they did not have a voice in making. As with other federal programs, deadlines called for a rate of change foreign to rural communities. And while the ABT evaluation is correct in saying that at the end of five years South Umpqua came the closest to achieving comprehensive change, the resulting fallout has convinced the majority of those involved that the price of ES was too high even though it brought close to a million dollars into the district. A backlash of conservative forces has resulted in many of the programs being discontinued, library books and curriculum materials are now scrutinized by a watchdog committee, a new board has been elected, the superintendent and associate superintendent have left, the new administration has a mandate to get things back to normal. While some of this conservative trend results from the times and the inmigration of individuals holding those views, the swing of the pendulum is greater in South Umpqua because of ES.

"Rural education would be improved if more rural schools adopted proven educational practices."---

The National Diffusion Network began in 1974 as a project funded under the Commissioner's discretionary allotment of Title III ESEA funds. In establishing the NDN, Office of Education staff reasoned that rather than subsidizing the development of more innovative programs, the time had come to spend the money on getting some of

the Title III pilot projects already developed put into use at the local school level throughout the nation. The projects they wanted to disseminate were those which had received a seal of approval from the OH/NIE Joint Dissemination Review Panel and were listed in the JDRP catalog, Educational Programs That Work.

The strategy devised for NDN was to put designated "change agents" into direct personal contact with local school personnel. Two categories of change agents were funded: developer/demonstrators---the original developers of exemplary Title III projects now assigned to demonstrate them in other districts and train teachers in their implementation---and state facilitators, who would serve as "linkers"---assisting local school staff in the assessment of their curricular needs and the choice of appropriate JDRP programs to meet them.

In Maine, facilitator Bob Shafto has convinced 65% of the state's school districts to adopt an NDN program. He points pridefully to side effects of the adoptions: school districts budgeting for the first time a line for teacher inservice training; superintendents becoming involved in curriculum discussions; and school staff learning to cooperate and work together as they go through an adoption. Like other state facilitators, he spends most of his time in rural districts. The personalized nature of the improvement strategy, the circuit-rider model of operation, and the low cost of the facilitator's service suggest that it might be an improvement strategy tailormade for rural schools.

Shafto insists, however, that the NDN operation works equally well in both rural and urban areas---and he has the support of

Lee Wickline, NDN director in Washington, on that point. Good programs, they say, are good programs, and there is a sufficient variety of them in the NDN catalog to cover virtually any school's needs. Actually, because NDN stresses the professionalism of teachers and encourages them to stay aware of the latest and best programs and instructional techniques, it has many of the characteristics of the one-best-system models. Shafto admits that he has not been successful in getting the smallest, most rural districts to adopt his programs, and he suspects that there is a "minimum size" necessary for a successful adoption.

"Rural education would be improved if better leadership were available."---

Convinced that the rural to urban migration had siphoned off the emerging young leadership needed to solve the problems of rural education, the Ford Foundation launched the Leadership Development Program to identify and help develop a new cadre of leadership from poor nonurban regions of the United States and parts of Canada. The ten-year, $10-million-dollar program provided year long fellowships to 700 individuals to pursue individually designed programs, combining such activities as apprenticeships, travel, visits to model projects, work experience, independent study, research and writing. Approximately 85% of the fellows have returned to their rural community or region to work. And while many have returned to leadership positions in education others have decided that the levers for improving rural education are more accessible if one works outside the education system. Efforts to develop new leadership in groups outside the socio/economic mainstream, i.e., traditional Native Americans, those living below the poverty line, were largely

unsuccessful. Even with special efforts to reach these populations, program activities, requirements for reporting, were sufficiently foreign to the existing lifestyle as to make the experience of questionable value.

The preceding strategies represent a wide variety of approaches to the improvement of rural schooling, but they share one common characteristic: They were all conceived by education policy makers rather than education practitioners. They are someone else's ideas of solutions to the problems experienced by the teachers, students, parents, and school administrators who themselves live and work in rural communities. As improvement efforts, they are intended to apply uniformly to a large number of local situations---in some cases, to all the schools in a portion of one state; in others, to all the rural schools in the nation.

There are, however, many hundreds of cases where rural people have themselves taken responsibility for improving education in their own community---according to their own perception of local needs, and through a strategy of their own choosing or design, without outside direction or control. Midway into our study, we concluded that our understanding of rural education improvement efforts would be incomplete without a look at some of these. It is not that we have been convinced that these small-scale, locally-initiated efforts have certain substantive elements which distinguish them from the larger-scale, interventionist efforts, however. Rather, we have included them because we believe they can, as a supplement to the others, provide a more detailed knowledge of rural educational reform. Because they offer examples of one

improvement effort matched to one community, they demonstrate more clearly the conditions which determine the result of a reform initiative.

In locally-directed efforts, we have seen even more clearly how much the ideology behind "educational improvement" varies from one cultural/geographic section to the other. Additionally, these case studies show that it also varies according to the role of the local initiating group---parents, teachers, administrators, or students. In choosing examples for this series of studies, we have considered both of these variables and have consequently found, again, several themes emerging.

Of the categories of approaches to rural school improvement summarized earlier in this paper, there is one which is not represented in this section. Nowhere among genuinely local initiatives can be found a movement based on a belief that the most serious problem in rural education is the existence of too many rural schools. All share the premise that rural schools should be preserved. Where the pressure to consolidate small schools has been particularly strong, it may be difficult for a locally-inspired reform effort to move beyond this beginning point. Thus, one of the most obvious and most frequent local definitions of improved education could be summarized, "Our education is better if our schools are kept in our local community."

It may seem unusual to classify an anticonsolidation struggle (typically seen as defensive or provincial) as an improvement effort. Yet such a movement may be propelled by a particular philosophy of education. Gaynell Begley, a mother and country storekeeper in Blackey, Kentucky, expressed just such a philosophy when she wrote,

on behalf of a group which called itself "The Committee for a School in Blackey":

> "We think it is important for our children to have a sense of the continuity of their lives as they flow from the lives of their parents, grandparents, and greatgrandparents. If our children are moved to a large, consolidated school, we lose touch with them, and they lose touch with the community. They will become citizens of nowhere...we want to help make their education relevant to their lives in the community."

Good education to Mrs. Begley and the other parents and teachers in her group was education which affirms a child's membership in his or her community. They practiced that philosophy and were intent on improving the educational program at their little elementary school in ways consistent with that belief. Parent volunteers were used extensively in the school, and local people were hired to help in the teaching of community history. They were intending to prove, Mrs. Begley said, "what a real community school can do in this modern age."

But one night the school burned to the ground. In the ensuing months, a large group of parents and teachers organized themselves to work for the rebuilding of the school in Blackey. The state department of education, however, was intent on sending the children to a consolidated school down the road. A protracted struggle followed with the parents steadfastly opposing the end of their local schooling. The county board of education outwardly remained sympathetic to the parents until a group of them revised their strategy and began to ask only for board support to maintain a community storefront school for the Blackey children---at which time the board support vanished. Soon after that, the parents abandoned their fight.

Because a local interpretation of educational improvement which centers on a belief that the school should not be removed from its native community is often at conflict with other views of educational improvement, the local "improvement" effort quickly is transformed into a political struggle between the groups with opposing views. In most cases, it pits parents and community groups against the professional leadership at the district level or above.

In Liberty, West Virginia, a group of parents protested the closing of their community school through consolidation. It was the last straw for a community which had been suffering under an autocratic educational regime. A political movement was soon organized with the goal of electing a new board of education in the county---one which would fire the superintendent as its first step and commit itself to community-based schooling as one of its next steps. After a carefully managed "scientific" campaign, the drive was successful; a reformist slate of candidates was elected, and several small community schools were reopened.

A local reform movement in Northcentral Iowa also fits this mold of political action in support of community schooling. Here, parents and community groups have carried their struggle one step further. In this region, the impetus for school consolidation has come not from boards of education or their superintendents but from legislators and the Department of Public Instruction. Their preferences for larger districts were expressed in a 1977 bill which mandated the consolidation of school districts with enrollments of less than 300 students. In response to the threat, two farm women began to lobby for the merits of small rural schools against the consolidation bill. They were soon

joined by several other women and four educators, and an organization was formed, with a name---People United for Rural Education (PURE)---and a purpose: "To promote the qualities that have been inherent in rural education and to pursue educational excellence that will enhance rural community life."

The organization has been basically a political action group, building a network of parents, superintendents, and school board members representing small Iowa schools. They publish a monthly newsletter, however, which includes columns on educational problems in rural schools and ways of addressing them, as well as information on schooling costs and arguments for combatting consolidation proponents. Annual conventions draw in speakers and experts in the field of rural education from across the country.

So far the group has been able to forestall additional reorganization in Iowa, but strong feelings in favor of school consolidation still exist at the state legislature and the state education department, and some observers are convinced they are simply postponing the inevitable.

Where a local initiative based on the desirability of community-based schooling does not immediately involve a political conflict, and where teachers are involved in it, there is the opportunity for a more advanced notion of improvement. The belief in a community-oriented education leads to the development of curriculum and instructional practices consistent with that preference. The thinking is, "Our education is improved if the curriculum focuses on our local community."

In Gary, Texas, a small town of about 200 near the Louisiana border, the community has maintained its own K-12 school with a total enrollment of about 200. The school program has been strictly conventional, reflecting the concerns of a conservative, tradition-minded community. Parents and other community members demonstrate their support of the school through their enthusiastic support of extra-curricular activities, especially athletics.

A Gary High School social studies teacher, Lincoln King, saw a copy of The Foxfire Book, a collection of articles selected from a magazine written and published by a group of high school students and their teacher in Northeastern Georgia which chronicled the customs, folklore, and crafts of their local area. King decided it was an idea which could work in Gary, and asked permission from his administration to begin such a magazine in his freshman geography class.

He got the permission and persuaded his students to give the magazine project a try. They put out one issue in the spring of the year, featuring student interviews with local characters, and were delighted when it promptly sold out. The following fall, the same group of students continued the magazine, working on it during a newly-created extra-curricular elective class. Since then, 23 issues have been published on a quarterly basis. The Gary community has been enthusiastically supportive of the venture. The class which is devoted to the production of the magazine remains as an elective for which students receive credit, but it does not count towards the completion of the academic requirements for graduation.

King is comfortable with the status of the class, finding advantages of its extra-curricular position in greater flexibility and freedom for him.

Elk River Idaho, a logging community of about 350 residents, is the scene of a quite different locally-initiated improvement effort. It proceeds according to a belief that, "Our education would be improved if our students are better prepared for the options available to them outside of their own community." Set deep in the woods behind a mountain, twenty miles from the nearest community, the town was literally built by the Potlatch Lumber Company as a base for its logging operations. It remains a one-industry town today. The community maintains its own K-12 school of 87 students and is determined to save it from consolidation. Improvement efforts have focused on the struggle to win accreditation for the school, finally achieved in the 1978-79 school year.

The drive has united parents, school board members, teachers, and the superintendent. While it centers on the need to keep the school in the community, it has not been characterized by a community-oriented curriculum development strategy. Instead, it has focused on the objective of making the school competitive with larger schools in the preparation of its students for "the real world". The chairman of the school board, a 49-year-old native of Elk River who has worked in the woods all his adult life says, "I don't think any man should have to bust his back for a living. That's what a lot of us do. What's it get him? It's just like a miner doesn't want his boy to be a miner. A lumberjack doesn't want his boy to be a lumberjack. These people have worked hard all their lives. They don't think it's a way to go."

Curriculum improvement has concentrated on the development of a systematic, fully-individualized approach to the teaching of traditional skills and content areas. The community has taxed itself beyond its legal obligation in order to be able to offer teachers one of the highest salary schedules in the state. It has also bought the school a 66-passenger bus, a station wagon, and a van---even though all students live within walking distance of the school, and there is no busing. The vehicles are used for frequent field trips around the state to familiarize students with the outside world. The community supports the school thoroughly and measures its success by the substantially higher than average achievement scores made by the children and the successful adjustment of many of them to college and other higher education institutions.

A final example of a notable local model of educational improvement was found in Staples, Minnesota, a town of 2700 residents in the central part of the state. With a K-12 district enrollment of over 1500, the survival of the school has never been a question, obviously. But when the railroad which provided most of the jobs in the community began to lay off workers, concern ran high that the town's future was at stake. The school board and the superintendent shared a belief that a healthy school system depended on a healthy community and vice-versa. Consequently, an approach to educational improvement emerged around the notion, "Our education would be improved if our community were improved."

Educational reform was undertaken from the standpoint of its relation to community development. Superintendent Duane Lund recalls that at a meeting of community leaders called for the

purpose of mapping out a strategy for the town's survival, everyone agreed "that of all the things we needed to do if we were going to build a community, the number one thing was, we have to have a strong school system. If we want to bring in new industry or new business or attract new people, we've got to be able to say, we've got a number one school system."

Lund took it upon himself to build a reputation for the Staples school. His primary strategy has been to develop other leadership within his system. An important part of that effort has been the active pursuit of federal grants to support innovative programming. Lund admits that the opportunities the federally-funded programs have provided for professional staff development have been more significant than the programs themselves. Additionally, the publicity they have brought the system has fit precisely into the original goal of image-building for the community.

The expertise of the school grantsman has been shared as well with the town; he writes proposals for municipal development grants, helps local businessmen prepare SBA loan applications, and chairs the community development corporation. The community development theme has also characterized program improvements at the vocational school operated under the district. Community service projects have been used as opportunities for teaching heavy equipment operation, as students built city parks, excavated airport runways, and prepared sites in the industrial park. Vocational programs in farm management have arisen in direct response to local needs, and the school acclaimed machine trades training program has enticed several machine tooling businesses to locate in Staples---a boost to the town's sagging economy.

CONCLUSIONS/POLICY ISSUES:

About Rural Communities/Rural Schools:

In 1965, when current policy on rural school improvement was falling into place, sociologists Friedman and Miller wrote, "from a sociological and indeed economic standpoint what is properly urban and properly rural can no longer be distinguished. The United States is becoming a thoroughly urbanized society, perhaps, the first such society in history".[1] James and Carolyn Robertson in The Small Towns Book (1978), state--- "rural America is for all practical purposes another culture. Lacking knowledge of its workings, we tend to regard it with indifference while we absorb its virtues. Like a less developed society, it is largely passive, submitting to acculturation and even seeking to speed the process, --- we damn it for being backward and then for being corrupted." Our views of rural America after two years of visiting rural schools would tend to agree more with the Robertsons than with Friedman and Miller. Life is different in Fort Gay and Holmes County than it is in St. Louis or Denver. Further, life in Fort Gay is also significantly different from that of Holmes County which is different from Devil's Lake, North Dakota. And whereas rural communities would seem to differ almost as much from each other as they do from their urban counterparts, there are some generalizable characteristics which have implications for public policy on rural education.

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[1] Friedman, John, and John Miller, 1965, "The Urban Field." Journal of the American Institute of Planners 31 (Nov.): 312-20

As is obvious rural communities are smaller than urban communities, what is not obvious is that the extreme differences in size result in a social structure which operates in a very different way. Information is more likely to be transmitted verbally rather than through memos or the New York Times, the validity of that information is based more on who said it rather than on the inherent rationality of the information. Time is governed more by the seasons of the year than a time clock. Social relationships are more personal and tightly knit, values tend to be more traditional, which is not to say that rural communities will not pursue new ideas if those ideas are perceived to be logical solutions to their problems. While rural communities in different parts of the country may differ markedly from each other within a given community the population is likely to reflect a high degree of homogenity.

Rural schools not only reflect the above characteristics but are unique in a number of other significant ways. Teachers of rural schools for instance seem to fall into two fairly distinct categories, the "locals" and the "professionals" ("professionals" in this usage does not necessarily imply better quality). The "locals" are housewives of established families, part-time farmers/ranchers/loggers who are also qualified teachers. Being community members, their first priority is maintaining those ties which make them a part of the community fabric. On the other hand, the first priority of the "professionals" is to move up in the education world and since assignments in small rural schools are not considered to be the top of the ladder, the "professional" is an itinerant

with tenure generally of five years or less. When push comes to shove on a reform issue, locals tend to take their cues from the community, "professionals" are more likely to take the word of educational experts. It is with the occasional individual who can walk the tightwire, balancing local cues with professional cues that productive rural school improvement is most likely to happen.

A further distinguishing difference is how the total educational program is perceived, both the curricular and extra curricular offerings. In larger school systems extra curricular activities are just that, a small part of the total program involving a relatively small percentage of the student body. In the small rural school the rate of participation in extra curricular activities is much higher, the leadership, character building, socialization skills which come from activity trips, FFA judging competitions are in fact a much more integral part of the school program. Loblolly in Gary, Texas, while enjoying the flexibility of extra curricular status is in many ways perceived to be as important an offering as English III. The role which athletic contests, musical presentations, etc. serve in linking rural schools and communities is of an entirely different order, for unlike the cities this may be the primary, if not the only source of public entertainment.

Given the reality of communities and rural schools, it is little wonder that generic school reform strategies have met with limited success. The agendas for such reform have often been distilled from urban problem definitions and therefore do not match the needs of small rural communities. Articulating local educational needs in "acceptable" proposal form is likely to be foreign even distateful to rural communities, residents of South

Umpqua were upset when they heard how badly their schools and communities were portrayed in the Experimental Schools proposal, a necessary exercise to show need for federal funding. Tight deadlines are inconsistent with the rural organic change process, large amounts of new money create a degree of displacement to the ongoing operation which is difficult to adjust to both at the time it is received and when it is no longer available.

About Appropriate Rural Education Reform:

Learning what doesn't work in rural school reform is much easier than discovering what should happen to improve rural education. Such deliberations are confounded by the fact that characteristics of rural communities are so diverse in their socio economic/cultural/geographical makeup as to negate the value of most, if not all, blanket solutions. What may be very appropriate for one setting does not at all fit in another. Further, there appears to be a growing disparity among all concerned with rural education, educators, policy makers, community members, as to what does constitute education improvement. In Iowa, policy makers and state education agency professionals feel that more consolidation would result in better rural education, while the People United for Rural Education are convinced that it would not. The Maine Facilitator Project (NDN) believes that a highly structured reading program (ECRI) will result in improving education while the New School Program of North Dakota argues that a more integrated approach to learning will best serve rural schools.

At a more general level there is little agreement on (a) whether bigger really is better, or whether there are advantages to smallness; (b) to what extent equal educational opportunity means the same educational opportunity; (c) the relative advantages and disadvantages of local control; (d) the value of maintaining the integrity of communities vs. the arguments for efficiency and effectiveness; (e) the proper balance between the good of individuals/local communities vs. the good of society. These are largely value issues, what one values determines the shape of desirable reform and the appropriateness of strategies to bring about that reform.

What is clear is that successful interventions must have a high degree of congruity with the cultural setting of the community as well as with perceived educational needs. The North Dakota New School Program is an example of how difficult this is to accomplish. According to the program rationale, moving toward a more informal, child-centered approach to learning would legitimize what schools were already doing of necessity, e.g., working with multiple age groupings. Further, informal classrooms encourage free and easy communication which North Dakota students and teachers need. The richness of concrete materials and other stimuli foster mathematical--as well as verbal and artistic expression--which North Dakota educationists felt were particularly important in making the transition to an urban society. The openness of the informal classroom and the fact that children's activities flow out of their own interests would sharply reduce the incidence of learning disabilities and behavior problems. As rational as the

arguments appeared, not anticipated was the inherent puritan ethic which held that "hard work" and "good discipline" were the cornerstones of good education. So when the dust settled from the New School intervention, the interns had come and gone and the retrained teachers were back in place, only a few of the child centered innovations promoted by New School survived and those that did were modified to fit the basic assumptions that communities held about the teacher teaching and the children learning what is taught.

Those programs which have met with a high degree of success have been fueled by and provided a payoff for some important segment of the larger socio/economic/political reality of the community. The concern for the decline of the Staples community spurred school improvement efforts that have paid off economically for both the school and community. PURE is motivated by the fear of losing a valued small town life style, the Rural Futures Development, strategy of the Northwest Lab, had a reason for being as long as the threat of legal action existed. Urban Rural/Experimental Schools/ Teacher Corps have not found this legitimacy in the local community setting.

Initiating rural education reform that has this level of integrity depends on a combination of (1) a sufficient hurt or perceived need; (2) an outside spark, an awareness of what could happen; plus (3) individuals with a commitment to the community which goes beyond career, the school, or the specific reform strategy. Further, it is clear that successful reform efforts are likely to be those that are sustained over long periods of time with relatively

small amounts of money. Large amounts of money over short periods of time often do more harm than good.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

If our conclusions have validity and we believe they do even though a thorough analysis of the case studies has not been completed, we are led to the following recommendations:

1. While we believe our perceptions about the nature of rural communities to be accurate, the data is incomplete. Further studies need to be initiated which will result in a typology of rural communities upon which more enlightened rural education policy could be based.

2. Present policy relating to rural education at both the state and federal level needs to give greater consideration to rural community differences. While much of such policy was designed to remove perceived deficiencies and while it should continue to be the role of state and federal government to stretch local agendas to include concerns for special populations, it is not their role to usurp the local agenda.

3. Because generic education policy has become so pursuasive we propose the establishment of a rural education ombudsman/facilitator role to hold the system at bay and allow alternative solutions/programs to emerge which might be more congruent with the reality of rural schools and communities.

4. In order for these more appropriate solutions/programs to emerge, we recommend steps be taken to nourish a rural education

development capability. Needed are:

a. Educational leaders who can give definition to and articulate rural education needs;

b. Program developers to work on high quality educational alternatives to the one-best-system;

c. Community leaders who can pursue the critical school/community interface issues which appear to be the key to both a healthy school and community.

Our experience would suggest that this development capability can best be furthered through the encouragement and support of networking and technical assistance activities rather than the development of formal education programs.

PROGRAMS INCLUDED IN STUDY

Programs:	Sites:
Center for Teaching & Learning, North Dakota University	North Dakota
Community Schools	Liberty, West Virginia Blackey, Kentucky
Educational Service Center	San Angelo, Texas
Experimental Schools	South Umpqua, Oregon
Leadership Development Program	Four Regional Programs
Loblolly	Gary, Texas
Mountain Towns Teacher Center	Wilmington, Vermont
National Diffusion Network	Gardiner, Maine
People United for Rural Education	Iowa
Rural Futures Development, Northwest Regional Education Laboratory	San Juan, Utah
School/Community Development	Staples, Minnesota
Teacher Corps	Holmes County, Mississippi
Upgrading Educational Program	Elk River, Idaho
Urban/Rural	Fort Gay, West Virginia